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THE STORIES BEHIND METAL'S  
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THIS MONTH:

# Nine Inch Nails'

## 'THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL'

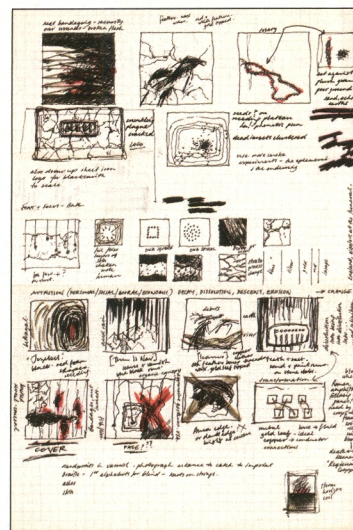
ARTIST **RUSSELL MILLS** SPILLS HIS  
OWN BLOOD FOR TRENT  
REZNOR'S MAGNUM OPUS



**W**HEN TRENT REZNOR contacted British collagist Russell Mills in 1994 about creating a cover for *The Downward Spiral*, the second album by his group Nine Inch Nails (who recently retired from playing live concerts), he had a list of words he wanted the art to evoke. Chief among them were "attrition," "wound," and "decay"—ideas the industrial rocker felt lurked beneath the "sheen of America's contemporary, highly glossed society," as Mills puts it. After being promised that the typography would be minimal, Mills says, "It seemed like a dream commission, as I was essentially being asked to produce the kinds of works that I would be doing anyhow."

Asked to create art for a bevy of items related to the album—the jewel case J-card, booklet, singles ("March of the Pigs" and "Closer to God"), and more—Mills ended up preparing 25 mixed media pieces for Reznor's consideration. Partway along, designer Gary Talpas told him he needed something for a slipcase, too. "It made little difference to my working process," Mills recalls. "I'd already identified the piece that I felt and hoped would be used as the front cover, which I was referring to as 'Wound.' Luckily I was right and 'Wound' was used on the slipcase cover, the 'shop window.'" Throughout most of the process, Mills hadn't even heard a note of music. When he finally got some songs, they only confirmed he was in the "right territory."

About what became the cover, Mills says, "I had been thinking about making works that dealt with layers—physically, materially, and



▲ Mills' sketches for *The Downward Spiral* cover

conceptually. Given the nature of the lyrics and the power of the music I was working with, I felt justified in attempting to make works that alluded to the apparently contradictory imagery of pain and healing. I wanted to make beautiful surfaces that partially revealed the visceral rawness of open wounds beneath."

Consisting of a two-foot square wooden panel slathered in plaster, oils, acrylics, rusted metals, dead insects, wax, varnishes, blood (Mills' own), and surgical bandaging, "Wound" took about two weeks to complete.

"Physically, it's sinewy and visceral, like the music," Mills says of the finished product. "I'd love to be doing more of this kind of work, especially for Nine Inch Nails, as my work seems like an ideal visual mirror for their music and for Trent's ideas." **J. BENNETT**



▲ Clockwise from top right: Unused piece "Tumult Still," unused piece "Needle to Needle," unused logo treatment, and close-up photos from *Downward Spiral*-related assemblages